**Five Tips for Unpacking the Standards**

**Tip 1: Look at all key verbs to clarify and highlight valid student performance in which content is used.**

For example, does “respond to” mean “resonate with” or “write about” or “make a personal connection to the text”? What counts as “understanding” the causes and effects of the Civil War?

**Tip 2: Look at the recurring nouns that signal big ideas.**

These may be key concepts, principles, themes, and issues that can be turned into essential questions and understandings.

**Tip 3: Identify and analyze the key adjectives and adverbs to determine valid scoring criteria and rubrics related to successful performance against the standards.** (this will be helpful for Stage 2)

**Tip 4: Identify and/or infer the long-term transfer goals by looking closely at the highest-level standards and indicators for them, or inferring the transfer goal from the content and justification for the standard.**

What are students eventually expected to do with the content? Long-term transfer goals answer the “Why are we learning this?” question. Ask yourself “what should students be able to do well on their own while using this content, to truly meet the standard and its purpose?”

**Tip 5: Consider the standards in terms of the long-term goal of autonomous performance.**

Add “on their own” to each standard to better understand the kind of independent transfer expected. Teachers often heavily scaffold learning activities, discussions, exercises and assessments until the end of the year. Students then get too little practice and feedback in identifying main ideas or solving multistep problems *on their own.*

**Also,**

Refer to **DPI’s unpacking documents** to verify your understanding of the standard.

**Some basic rules for interpreting established standards:**

* Look closely at the verbs, but be aware that not all standards documents use verbs consistently to signal the type of goal or degree of cognitive demand.
* Some standards statements begin with a low-level verb (identify, describe, state). Don’t be confused into thinking that this automatically signals a skill. Generally, such statements call for knowledge. For example, “Identify parts of speech” specifies declarative knowledge because it means the student “will know the parts of speech,” despite the action verb in the beginning.
* When higher-order verbs are used (analyze, infer, generalize), the goal can be ambiguous. If the verb is followed by or describes general abilities, it is likely stating a transfer goal. However, the verb may be used as a performance indicator and thus will be more useful for determining specific evidence in stage 2.

Wiggins and McTighe (2012). *The Understanding by Design Guide to Advanced Concepts in Creating and Reviewing Units* (pages 11-12).